

id: 171715
date: 9/26/2008 20:18
refid: 08HAVANA781
origin: US Interests Section Havana
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination:
header:
VZCZCXYZ0012
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUB #0781/01 2702018
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 262018Z SEP 08
FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3761
RUCOWCX/CCGDEIGHT NEW ORLEANS LA PRIORITY
INFO RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0547
RUEHBH/AMEMBASSY NASSAU 0034
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 0009
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 0027
RUCOWCV/MARINCEN MIAMI FL
RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM CMD CTR MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAHLA/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/NAVINTELOFC GUANTANAMO BAY CU
RUESDM/JTLO MIAMI FL
RHMFISS/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RUCOWCA/COMLANTAREA COGARD PORTSMOUTH VA 0125
RUCOWCV/COMCOGARD SECTOR KEY WEST FL
RHMFISS/COGARD INTELCOORDCEN WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000781

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/26/2018
TAGS: SNAR, PGOV, PREL, SMIG, PHUM, CU
SUBJECT: LIKELIHOOD OF A CUBAN MASS MIGRATION FOLLOWING
HURRICANE DESTRUCTION

Classified By: COM JONATHAN D. FARRAR, REASONS 1.4 B & D

1. (C) Summary: Hurricane season 2008 has been especially unkind to the island of Cuba. Four consecutive storms, concluding with the most recent, Hurricane IKE, left much of the island in shambles. Buildings and homes, tobacco and

sugar crops, and island-wide infrastructure have all been affected, including 444,000 damaged houses, and 63,000 houses destroyed. The level of destruction has led many Cuba watchers to ask whether a Cuban mass migration is likely in the near future. While the aforementioned events have indeed been historic in proportion, from our vantage point we see no indication that a mass migration from Cuba is pending. However, U.S. Interests Section (USINT) believes this is an issue that must be given due deference as the outcome of post-hurricane recovery efforts will play a large role in determining whether Cubans take to the sea or remain on the island. End Summary.

2. (C) During post-hurricane interactions with a variety of sources in Cuba, USINT personnel have not detected any indication a mass migration from Cuba is pending. Further, Cubans who have regular contact with USINT (mainly dissidents, refugees, and religious groups), including those from Pinar del Rio, one of the worst hit and affected Cuban provinces, have not reported the existence of rumors or preparations by Cubans to depart the island in increased numbers or larger go-fast or rustica loads.

3. (C) In conversation with Cuban Ministry of Interior (MININT) personnel, specifically the Cuban Border Guard (CBG), the USINT Coast Guard Drug Interdiction Specialist (DIS) learned that some CBG coastal outpost units in Ciego de Avila, Camaguey, and Las Tunas provinces were damaged during the wave of hurricanes, and that CBG troops are busy making repairs to infrastructure there. However, as expected, a CBG Colonel informed the DIS that CBG patrols have not been scaled back. It should be noted that during a separate meeting with MININT/CBG personnel immediately following the passing of IKE, the same Colonel asked the DIS whether the US Coast Guard was planning "an operation" following that most recent hurricane; DIS believes the Colonel's question, in the context of the meeting and conversation, was an attempt to gauge whether the US government was concerned about an increase in Cuban migrant departures or mass migration, and inadvertently suggested himself that there was a fear on the part of the CBG that at least an increase in Cuban migration numbers was possible.

4. (C) Cubans we speak with are increasingly frustrated with the difficulties caused by the hurricanes and the GOC's refusal to accept some foreign assistance offers. However, the Cuban people possess a rather high boiling point: Cubans have adopted a wait-and-see posture, also doing the best they can in the interim to reinstall some sense of Cuban-style "normalcy." Via Cuban state broadcast television and radio, the GOC has urged Cubans to fight, be disciplined, and exhibit solidarity following each hurricane's destructive path, and encouraged Cubans to work harder to overcome current conditions.

5. (C) While there have been no suggestions of a mass migration event from Cuba, the ingredients necessary for the

Cuban people and/or government to cook-up such a scenario have manifested in Cuba over the past two months- they include: multiple natural disasters, damaged or destroyed infrastructure, an apparent shortage of food on the island, significantly increased fuel prices, and a Cuban government whose post-hurricane response and recovery "expertise" are in demand and are apparently spread dangerously thin from the

Province of Pinar del Rio in the west to Guantanamo Province in the east, and in every province in between. Further, as the rise and fall of Cuban migrant flow relies heavily on weather conditions and sea state, the chances for an increased egress of Cuban migrants prior to the winter cold fronts and subsequent heavy seas would be more likely. Many Cubans may attempt to depart the island hoping to beat the heavy seas or reunite with family in south Florida prior to the holiday season; this hurricane season may exacerbate that trend.

6. (C) Comment: While the international community has its eyes fixed on Cuba's pending response to the offers of financial and resource assistance from the US government to the GOC, it is possible that Cuban authorities will attempt to mitigate the departure of Cuban migrants from the island towards the United States to avoid negative press and embarrassment. However, as international interest wanes, Cuban authorities may also lose interest in curtailing the flow of Cubans towards the United States. End Comment.
FARRAR

=====CABLE ENDS=====